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ABSTRACT

The Central Indiana Committee for Foreign Language Study was organized by college language departments in 1982 and funded by the National Endowment for the Humanities as an autonomous collaborative group of interested French, Spanish, and German teachers at the elementary, secondary, and postsecondary levels. The purposes of the committee are to enable the teachers to keep up to date in their fields; to have low-cost, locally-based opportunities for professional development; to enable participants to benefit from professional contact with colleagues in diverse specialties and at different levels of practice; and to improve the quality of the professional work of local colleagues. A steering committee laid the groundwork, and interest groups and subgroups were formed for curriculum and professional development and foreign language promotion. After two organizational meetings, themes such as methodologies and computer use were introduced, and a group position paper concerning the public image of foreign language study was released. Participation level has run to 25 to 30 percent of the area's language teachers. Attracting more participants and solidifying membership are objectives for the near future. (MSE)

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Central Indiana's Foreign Language Collaborative: An NEH Experiment

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During the summer of 1982, a project funded by the National Endowment for the Humanities invited foreign language departments at institutions of higher learning to take the initiative in establishing autonomous collaborative groups at the local level. As members of such a group, interested foreign language teachers on the elementary, secondary, and post-secondary levels might (1) keep up-to-date in their fields; (2) have low-cost, locally-based opportunities for professional development; (3) benefit from professional contact with colleagues in diverse specialties and at different levels of practice; and (4) concern themselves with improving the quality of the professional work done by local colleagues.

A local group of foreign language teachers applying to participate in the project was asked first to establish an *ad hoc* steering committee whose membership would represent all educational levels of foreign language instruction. Our *ad hoc* committee met for the first time in Indianapolis during the fall of 1982. It consisted of twenty-one foreign language teachers of French, German, and Spanish: twelve from the secondary level; eight from the university level; and one administrator from the Indiana State Department of Public Instruction.

The committee surveyed the central Indiana area and found there were 346 full-time and part-time foreign language teachers in the elementary and secondary schools of the area, and 45 full-time and part-time

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faculty members on the post-secondary level. Foreign language enrollments on the university level were 1,218 and enrollments at the elementary and secondary levels were 9,981. The *ad hoc* committee also focused its attention on defining areas of concern common to all foreign language teachers. Commonly agreed-upon concerns of the central Indiana group were: (1) curriculum; (2) professional development of faculty; (3) promotion of foreign language study within the schools and universities.

The area of curriculum needs was further subdivided into the following categories: (1) a core curriculum for foreign language teachers; (2) help in using computers in foreign language education; (3) support groups in the local schools; (4) curricular articulation between secondary schools and colleges; (5) information on careers in foreign languages; (6) foreign languages in the elementary schools; (7) a foreign language materials resource center; and (8) an oral based curriculum.

Since the Indiana Department of Public Instruction was in the process of adopting language textbooks for the next six-year period, the *ad hoc* committee decided that the local group could have its most immediate impact in curriculum. The committee then sent a one-page flyer to announce the first general meeting to be held on May 14, 1983, at Indiana University at Indianapolis. All foreign language teachers in the central Indiana area were informed of the purpose of this local group and were provided with a copy of the meeting agenda. Teachers were asked to respond to the committee's invitation.

At this general meeting, the state foreign language consultant reviewed briefly the guidelines for foreign language textbooks in the state. The approximately 50 teachers who attended the first meeting met in individual interest groups to discuss how listening, reading, writing, speaking, and culture should best be presented in foreign language texts. Each group then reported its recommendations to the general meeting, and the *ad hoc* committee published a newsletter listing these specific recommendations. This newsletter was sent to all foreign language teachers in the area, State Superintendent of Public Instruction staff members, administrators of area schools, and members of the state-wide textbook adoption committee.

At the second meeting of the Central Indiana Committee for Foreign Language Study, the 50 teachers in attendance divided into interest groups which included curriculum, professional development, and promotional

concerns. Additional meetings dealt with concerns such as computerized instruction, and foreign language conversation practice. The promotion committee met later to plan and direct a Central Indiana student essay contest on "Why Study a Foreign Language?" Winners of the essay contest were presented prizes by the Mayor of Indianapolis in the spring of 1984. Money for the prizes was donated by various local business establishments.

A third general meeting of the Central Indiana group took place on the first Saturday of May 1984. The principal theme of this meeting was foreign language methodologies. The group focused its attention on the Rassias method and the Total Physical Response method of foreign language instruction. During the general session, two films illustrating these methods were viewed by the entire group and a general discussion followed. After the general session, local teachers demonstrated the Rassias method in a classroom atmosphere. Teachers were asked to attend a session which illustrated the method in a language other than the one they taught, and then a similar session in their own language. The interest and enthusiasm which resulted among the teachers has led Indiana University at Indianapolis to sponsor a three-day seminar by Professor Rassias which will be held in March, 1985.

The Central Indiana Committee for Foreign Language Study planned its fourth general meeting for December 1, 1984. Held at a local area high school, the meeting involved a discussion of utilization of computers in foreign language instruction.

The future of Central Indiana's Committee for Foreign Language Study looks promising. Its members now have a forum in which to address common concerns and to promote activities of mutual interest to all foreign language teachers. Since group members are close geographically, they are attuned to the community's pulse and are in a position to respond immediately to local language issues, and to design publicity to promote foreign language study. Proximity of members encourages better attendance at meetings and greater local contact among teachers of the various languages. The feeling of isolation which many language teachers feel is mitigated by their contact.

As an outgrowth of the *ad hoc* committee's resolve to define goals, a position paper was designed, printed, and distributed in the spring of 1984. In it, the public image of foreign language study is unquestionably

the main area of concern. To promote public awareness, the committee is exploring strategies to open communication with the community's business and political sectors. Foreign language study is needed in Indiana, a state intent on increasing its marketing efforts overseas. The committee hopes to organize lobbying groups in order to develop language study as a political issue. With its base in Indianapolis, the capital of Indiana, the committee has access to political representatives and opportunities to express its concerns. To date, 25 to 30 percent of the foreign language teachers in the local area have attended at least one general meeting sponsored by the group. The *ad hoc* committee hopes to attract more participants, and a newsletter serves as a means of solidifying membership and attracting prospective newcomers.

The activities of the Central Indiana Committee for Foreign Language Study are a positive result derived from the impetus gained by the announcement of the NEH grant in 1982. Further programs of this local group of foreign language teachers can only enhance and strengthen the study of foreign language and literature, and other states or regions may wish to use its activities as a model.